CM 175 462 [844] arms. It is true that all this work which the Indian women must perform is made more tolerable by the fact that they are very strong and robust. Proof of this robustness is what they do as soon as they give birth: going to the river or stream with their newborn child they go into the water and swim about and wash themselves thoroughly, and do not experience the least harm as a result. However, should the husband capture a woman from some Indian nation or from among the CM Spaniards, her life is spared so that she may serve his wife as a slave, [595] and him as a concubine—but he must be secretive in his relationships with the captured woman for the wives are extraordinarily jealous and will make things difficult for the husband should he make advances towards a Spanish woman. . . .

CM 175 [164] "Smallpox is a great scourge to these nations, and makes terrible inroads into them because they have no doctors other than the CM old fakers, and if the latter do not cure the sick person, and they [764] usually don't, then all will abandon him to his fate. When anyone dies, those who happen to be present open up a grave for him on the very spot, bury him stretched full-length, stick a spear into the ground over his resting place and hang a Christian's or some other enemy's skull on the CM shaft's end; then they desert the place and never return to it while [771] memory of it lasts. Not even a trace of religion has been found among them, rather are they perfect athiests without the least knowledge about the afterlife or the immortality of the soul. They have a certain CM respect for their female witchdoctors, more out of fear of what they may 175 do to them than from any good they may hope to receive from them. 756 These witchdoctors try to make the others believe that they hold in their hands the power to heal or to make sick, and these are the ones who resist the Gospel most vigorously, using their influence to keep their followers from receiving Holy Baptism or allowing their children to receive it, and persuading them that baptism will kill them. To this end, to bolster their arguments, they take advantage of what happens in any mission post when the missionaries only baptize those who are about to die, and as the Indians then usually see such a person die, the noxious error becomes more firmly rooted in their untutored minds." "Descripción del Chaco" [Chorographic Description of the Chaco] page 82.

CM This account by the Missionary Fathers is confirmed by what has 114 been observed by travelers who have visited these same Indians in more modern times, even in the present day. [579]

756 "As in all the tribes of this America, there are among our Mataguayos certain doctors or wizards, whom they call "yegu." They are feared and respected. Those who wish to enter this profession go off into the uninhabited areas for a few days, fast rigorously and run about continuously day and night. Their manner of effecting a cure is to lean their whole bodies right over the sick person, who is lying on the ground, place both hands in the form of a tube over the affected and painful parts and then blow with all their might emitting at the same time a series of hoarse bellows. They persevere in this treatment for hours on end and even all night long. By way of payment they are given anything they ask for to the point that the invalid may be left naked, but if the sick person should not recover, his relatives will insist that everything be returned. When an epidemic of some sort appears in the village or in the surrounding villages, all the yegus come together, sit down a short distance away from the group of huts and with their faces turned toward them burst forth into a melancholy song accompanied by the sound of some small gourds filled with stones which they shake at the same time. They think that this will frighten the pestilence away or prevent its entering."

164 "A common malady among the Mataguayos is mange, and the disease which ravages them most is pleurisy. As soon as they become ill they shave their heads and call the yegu. When an invalid starts 763 to die he is taken to the place where he is to be buried and there, in 764 order to have him avoid the anguish of his last moments, he is choked to death. The body, not extended but half raised, is placed in a rather shallow hole which, after being covered with branches and grass, has earth thrown on it."

768 "On returning from the funeral all the equipment which belonged to the deceased is broken up; his hut is dismantled and taken to a new spot [596] or at the very least the door through which he [764] passed on being carried out to his grave is covered over. Each village has its own common burial ground which is always close at hand."

765 "The deceased's relatives gather around the grave on the night following the burial, and perform the funeral rites with lugubrious clamorings and drumming on their pimpines. For some time they abstain from eating fish and other meats.

774 "They have a vague notion of the soul which they call Neuseh of which they believe that it outlives the body and transmigrates into

342 stick them into the earth in a sloppy circle, tie the ends together with any old thing, place a little straw on top and there they have a house with the appearance of an upturned funnel. And in there do
342 these privileged beings live, with more peace and tranquility than
513 kings in their sumptuous palaces; there do they build their fires and eat; there do the men and women sleep, with their parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, and always in the company of a few dogs, on the bare ground or on a piece of reed matting, or on the skin of some wild pig they have killed, or cow they have stolen, all together in a jumble—this one with his head on his neighbor's chest, that one with his legs on some other's chest and the dogs on top of anyone who strikes them as comfortable. In this way their miserable
361 hovels soon swarm with insects and then they set fire to them and build others somewhere else—so they are forever moving into [602] new houses because those they construct are only makeshift. Furthermore they tend not to live in the same hut for long because of their habits of spending seasons now in one place now in another, according to the weather and time of year as for example: during the season of good fishing they spend weeks and months shifting continually from one section of the river to another, from the river to some stream, from the stream to some lake; in the fruit season they do the same thing."

"And so, as they are little inclined to bathing and always go
515 about dirty, and sleep piled up on each other together with their dogs,
●164 they are almost always full of mange, a disease which even kills many infants. Many of them, if it should fall that they take a bath, take pleasure, while still wet, in rolling about on the river sand or in the ashes which are in their huts, as do certain animals which seem to require filth. On certain days and in certain seasons they blacken
302 their chests and faces with charcoal in order to appear more handsome or to show that they are celebrating some occasion."

"All of them cut their hair with a knife or with the teeth of fish, this for lack of scissors, which implement would have only a
[304] limited utility among them anyway. They also customarily pierce their ears, in order to insert a piece of stick or something as a fine ornament. The men pluck out with their nails the few hairs which grow on their faces, and some also pull out their eyelashes and eyebrows."

"Both men and women dress very simply, that is, they tie to
291 their waists a piece of any old thing, such as a piece of hide or cloth

It seems to me that some philosophers, among them, 771
Humboldt in his Cosmos, have pointed out this same fact and have given it a name which I cannot now recall.

It is very difficult to get any information from the Indians 123
regarding their beliefs: they, in spite of having a deep disregard 771
and scorn for the mysteries of the Christian faith, do all they can to avoid being ridiculed, threatened and catecized by their presumptious and intolerant enemies.

Faustino, a Christian and a refugee from amongst them, when questioned by me regarding any of their religious practices, would answer: "I do not know, sir -- the Indians are very distrustful."

The following which I am about to recount I gathered directly from some of them after having been successful in inspiring them with confidence by talking with them, giving them presents, being very friendly and having close acquaintance with them and by letting them see that I had a high regard for their beliefs. 776

Among the Matacos the spirits are called a'hót, and among the Vilelas, cokss.

These spirits live underground but at nighttime they come up out of the earth and wander about near men's houses; they also enter the bodies of persons and usually cause them to become diseased. The a'hót ride upon the wind, accompany storms (or [753]
are indeed the very storms themselves) and dance around the villages, huts and persons whom they wish to injure. The most terrible a'hót is smallpox, against which the witchdoctors are absolutely powerless. So terrified are the Indians of this a'hót that when it appears in a hauet-éi (village) they all abandon it as fast as they can, usually setting fire to it and abandoning the sick there. In spite of this [199] smallpox wreaks havoc among 164 ●
them, mostly, I believe, because of not taking the proper precautions (which is impossible, their houses and clothing being what they are) rather than because of lack of domestic and personal cleanliness which, in so far as I have been able to observe, is quite adequate. Practically all cases of smallpox prove fatal, and that is why one sees so few Indians marked by the disease.

Every man has a soul which, after he has died, goes down 775
into the earth to join its companions, amongst whom he enjoys

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must then be on the alert and have his horses and mules well secured. The settlers generally hunt the jaguar by means of hounds, of which of course a great number must be used. Badly attacked by its assailants, the beast at last seeks refuge in climbing a tree, where it is generally easily shot.

The natives stand in great fear of the jaguar, looking upon it as the incarnation of an evil spirit, and the beast does in fact seem to have far less respect for the Indian than for a white man. In the religion and mythology of the Chaco Indians the jaguar plays an important part.

The puma is rare, and the same may be said of the maned wolf (*Canis jubatus*) which is reported to exist in the Chaco, for I never saw or heard of any. The fox is very common on the plains, and its howling or barking is one of the characteristic sounds interrupting the silence of night. Of birds there is no great variety in the Chaco. Doves, wild turkeys, and small parrots are, in addition to ostriches, the birds most commonly seen in the pampas regions and forests. Only at the big lagoons, found here and there in the interior of the country, may one notice a rich bird-life, especially during the dry season. Ducks of different kinds, white and yellow herons, storks, and other aquatic birds in countless numbers give life to these places, whither also many animals of the forest descend to allay their thirst.

Venomous snakes, even rattlesnakes, are quite common on the plains, especially during the dry season. Both in the river Pilcomayo and in the lagoons alligators are found, although in the Argentine and Bolivian Chaco they are not as numerous as in the Rio Paraguay. The rivers moreover abound in fish, and all the Pilcomayo tribes live mainly by fishing.

Insect-life is very rich in summer-time. Different kinds of mosquitoes, crickets, large beetles, and especially the *Cicada* with its shrill whistling, shortly before sunset and at night fill the air with their weird sounds, innumerable croaking frogs joining in the concert. These manifestations of lower animal life, as they are perceived at sunset, are, I believe, the things that most impress a traveller in the Chaco.

Although mosquitoes are numerous and troublesome in the summer, the climate is on the whole healthy. Malarial fever does not occur, except when it is occasionally introduced by settlers or other white men. Rheumatism and catarrhs are the ailments from which the natives most commonly suffer.

The scarcity of water has been the greatest obstacle to the exploration of the Chaco. In the Bolivian Chaco the traveller preferably keeps to

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753 way the Indian has arrived at the theory of »possession«: an evil spirit has entered the body in the form of a material object of some kind. It is the medicine-man's business to extract the evil intruder, and if he succeeds in doing so, the patient will recover. An epidemic, on the other hand, especially such as has come to the Indians from another part of the country, is believed to be directly caused by special disease- and death-demons of a particularly malignant character, who wander about in the village carrying off one victim after the other. Against these demons even the art of the medicine-man is powerless. The only thing the panic-stricken Indians can do in such cases is to abandon the haunted village as soon as possible and wander off to another part of the country.

There is, to these Indians, practically no such thing as »natural« disease and death. Every illness is attributed to supernatural causes, be the diagnosis in a particular case witchcraft or disease.

Therefore, in dealing with native methods of curing illness we are here only concerned with such evils as are set down to witchcraft.

● 164 There are certain ailments which are particularly characteristic of
753 the Chaco Indians. Rheumatic pains, especially during the dry season, are very common. and both young and old people suffer from them. As we know. they usually come on very suddenly, and even civilized peoples still use expressions like »fairy-dart«, »*Hexenschuss*«, etc. of such sudden ailments. Beliefs of this kind are held both by the *Choroti*
753 and by the other Chaco Indians. The Indians have very concrete ideas as to the way in which the sorcerers and the demons who serve them operate. The mysterious pain suddenly afflicting a man is explained as due to an arrow shot by an evil spirit. The Choroti accordingly call this disease-demon *mōhsek ihītek*, i.e. »the arrow-shooting demon«, and this is an idea which is quite common among the South American Indians in general. The expression seems to indicate that at least in some cases an evil spirit is supposed to operate alone. As a rule, however, he is sent by a human sorcerer. I have already mentioned that the »arrow« or »splinter«, discharged by the sorcerer or his assistant demon, is generally a small stone, a cactus thorn, a piece of bone, or a small insect (for instance a worm or a beetle). I have also stated that this seemingly insignificant material object is identical with a mysterious demoniacal being whom the medicine-man, in curing the patient, tries to »extract« from his body. The object is sent by a *mōhsek*, or in a certain sense *is* a *mōhsek*. Generally, however, the Choroti call the mysterious intruder

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estos indios que están acosados por una situación económica de día en día más difícil y que fuera de las misiones están sometidos a múltiples vejámenes y humillaciones. No obstante no se han observado crisis de suicidio entre los demás indios del Chaco argentino que viven bajo condiciones igualmente desfavorables. Hay también indicios de que los casos de suicidio eran comunes al principio de la era de las misiones y esto puede hacernos suponer que el suicidio era la expresión tradicional de la agresión en contra de los miembros de su grupo contra los cuales el individuo no podía vengarse en otra forma. El ejemplo dado por un suicida se hace contagioso y de allí nacen epidemias esporádicas de envenenamiento.

767 The high rate of suicide among the Matako Indians of the Argentine Gran Chaco is a social phenomenon well worth our attention. In this tribe suicide at times assumes the character of an epidemic that causes havoc among the people and is a serious problem for the [197] English missionaries who have several stations along the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. To these missionaries, especially to Dr. Collins [115] Smith and J. White, I am indebted for most of my information on the suicidal mania that has flared up on several occasions during the past ten years. Personally, I have witnessed only one case. Information about suicide among the Matako who live in the bush or as miserable hilotes around the white settlements is not available, but there is little doubt that if the Matako in the missions are so prone to take their lives, those who find themselves exposed to hunger and mistreatment will be even more inclined to end their days wilfully.

Suicide among the Matako takes a strictly patternized form. In all cases known to me, the victims poisoned themselves by eating the [824] fruits of the sachasandia (Capparis salicifolia Griseb). This fruit, the size of a walnut, grows on a tree which is very common in the Chaco region between the Bermejo and Pilcomayo Rivers. It ripens in December, the period which coincides with the largest number of 262 suicides. Strangely enough, the sachasandia is also an important food for the chaco Indians; it is collected in the summer, dried in 251 the sun and stored in caraguata bags to be consumed during the lean winter months. Even dried these fruits are extremely poisonous and 252 before eating them the Indians boil them six or seven times in different waters.

The clinical symptoms of sachasandia poisoning are: convulsions, 762 foaming at the mouth and, finally, coma. The heart beat becomes 164 jerky with short stops and upsurges of activity. The muscles of the throat are affected with paralysis and the patient makes a gurgling sound. When paralysis sets in, no emitic can be taken orally. The last phase of the agony is characterized by jumpy motions of the body

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and jerky contractions. A strong diarrhea is also a concomittant effect of the poisoning.

Those who have been saved by prompt medical treatment (injection or morphine) describe their symptoms as follows: At first they feel considerably depressed, then they grow more and more dizzy "as if the world were going head over heels". The dizziness increases until the victim is forced to lie down.

It is apparent from the cases cited here that suicide among the Matako does not always take a collective form, but it may frequently do so. Death by suicide appears to be a temptation to which individuals yield with amazing facility and which is often contagious.

Case Histories

The very day I arrived at the Mission of San Andrés on the Upper Pilcomayo I was made aware of the frequency of suicide by poisoning. A young Indian in the mission suddenly took sick. (He was suffering from malaria.) At the first sign of his illness, his family rushed to the missionary to tell him the young man had eaten sachasandia and to ask for prompt help.

Later there was a real alarm when a young woman actually did attempt to kill herself. The woman had a lover who lived in another village with his wife and two children. The man's grandmother (Mother's mother) feared that he might desert his family and took steps to prevent such a disgrace. For this reason she called on the missionary and urged him to interfere. The missionary talked to the girl's parents and learned from them that the girl's lover often stayed at their home. A few days before the young woman had gone to her lover's village and had snatched a knife and other goods from his house. When she returned to her home, she demanded a compensation before she would break off relations with the man. Afterwards she suddenly left home and went to call on distant relatives in whose house she went to sleep. When these people wanted to send her back, they were unable to wake her. An old woman noticed a faint smell of sachasandia on her breath and immediately sent for the missionary. The limbs of the patient were already twitching, her mouth rigid. After an injection of morphine she began to vomit and so recovered.

Second Case. At another mission a 16 year old orphan committed suicide. The girl had had several love affairs but had formed no stable tie with a man. Finally she ate sachasandia and, since no one came to her assistance, died in the middle of the village. A woman took the dead orphan's head on her lap and her distant relatives wailed the whole day and night. Afterwards, however, the body was left

/212 cont./

755 756 783 796 The follow-up to the ceremony was what we could call a general disinfection. The medicine men began by dusting each other off, making their rattles jingle right against the bodies of their colleagues, and blowing on the tops of their heads or the napes of their necks, as is done for illness. Then all the men, women, and children who had attended the ceremony as spectators were summoned. They sat down and the medicine men and medicine women /given in English/ came to pass their feather brooms over their bodies, to blow on their heads, and to make the rattles jingle along their bodies. These rites were carried out just as scrupulously for the children as for the adults.

/213/ My friend Sanchez was the object of particular pains; after the chief medicine man in person had blown over him, he was assisted by four medicine men, two of whom blew and sang over him, while the other two shook rattles, bells, and maracas.

Those of the medicine men who were not occupied with the disinfecting turned halfway around and repeated all the gestures which they had previously carried out. From time to time one or another again left the row to mow down the grass and furiously engulf the illness. The whistles succeeded each another at intervals which were ever closer together, and the rattles were shaken with more energy and insistence.

The ceremony was over when all the members of the community were considered relieved of the evil influences with which they had been impregnated.

Notes

[164] [231] 1. The illness to be expelled was hoof-and-mouth disease, with which the livestock was then stricken, and which had had unfortunate consequences on the health of the people. Several who had eaten contaminated meat had fallen ill.

/216 cont./

755 536 they approached the sick woman and passed the poncho over her head; next they ran to the exit and shook it. They repeated this maneuver several times, then completely enveloped the woman in the poncho, and a medicine man began to rub her through the cloth. Everyone was singing but some were not dancing. After some time the poncho was taken off, carried at a running pace to the exit, and thrown outside. The dance was resumed; an assistant threw some water on the ground, and the chief medicine man then stopped the dance again. He sat next to the sick woman, covering himself completely with a large black blanket, and began to speak with the illness; during this time the man who was watering the ground carried up a bucket of water and, with the help of a medicine man, washed the face, head, and body of the sick woman, who was turned with her feet toward the passage made in the crossbars, and a path was traced with water from her feet to the passage. The chief medicine man got up and the dance was resumed with renewed ardor. During this dance the assistant moistened the shoulders [302] of the male dancers, while an old man painted the faces of the women red, giving them two circles on the cheek bones and a streak along the nose. At the same time one medicine man blew on the sick woman and another covered her face with a red cloth. At the end of a certain time the sick woman lay down, the dance continued, taking on a threatening character, and then suddenly the people appeared satisfied, having undoubtedly obtained a momentary success. The ceremony stopped and was resumed after an hour.

Note

[164] [132] According to the medicine men with whom I had a chance to talk about these two sick women, they were suffering from "sickness in the chest," /217/ easily explicable by a sharp atmospheric drop of almost 25° in 24 hours.

/319 cont./

433 They do not work, plant, or do anything similar; they
222 are but mediocre fishermen and barely hunters. To live they
241 lay up great stocks of chañar, algarrobas, and mistol fruits, and with some gourd seeds placed under the earth they have extraordinary harvests if the year is moderately rainy.

786 They organize their orgies when the algarrobas, chañar,
578 and mistol are in season, and then the quarrels and murders occur
682 among the men; these crimes go unpunished by the authorities, for there are none. But if the one who has perished had relatives they will take revenge.

342 /320/ They do not bother to build houses or such things.
513 They make a kind of oven; for it they bend some branches of small trees, fix them to the ground, cover these branches with straw or grass, and they sleep underneath in a pile in the company of their dogs.

164 This is the reason for the excessive mange which kills
515 them and makes them look so disgusting, since they are not at all partisans of the daily bath, as the Chiriguano are, and when they do bathe, they roll about in the river sand or in the ashes of their oven-houses.

584 They do not seek the consent of their parents for marriage
585 nor do they have ceremonies. Do two young persons, a man and a woman, love each other? They leave the common settlement, go to the woods, stay a few weeks, and then return, now married, to live with their in-laws or to make another oven like the one of their elders.

586 Young people divorce each other easily, but they are
152 more constant than the Chiriguano in married life. Nonetheless,
837 the women are very jealous and do not readily consent to their
593 husbands' being with other women; for this reason they keep them content with the work of bringing them much fruit from the forest and caressing them.

302 Men and women cut their hair; some of them stain their
301 faces and pierce their ear lobs, in which they put a piece of wood, like the Toba, but this is not a distinctive mark of the race.